

Duxbury Clipper, Wednesday, May 15, 1996

(Sergeant Richard Bayramshian wrote this article for the May 8, 1975 Anniversary Issue of the Clipper.)

Early Police History

The Duxbury Police Department has over the years responded to a growing population and an increasing demand for more services.

In 1915 the year round population was 1921; in 1931, around 2500. By 1960 the population was 4727. During this 45-year period the population had grown 245.7% or to 2800 additional town residents. Between 1960 and 1970 the town population had expanded to 7625 persons. In a mere decade there was an 161.3% increase.

From 1970 to 1974, an influx of 2726 persons brought the year round population to 10,351.

This enormous growth brought along with it a demand for expanded town services including a larger police force.

A major element of police responsibility are the juvenile problems. In 1931 the total Duxbury school population was 365; in 1959, 770; in 1961 it was 1232; and by 1974 the student enrollment was around 3,000. After the expressway was completed, more people moved from the cities to the suburban communities. This major exodus forced smaller communities to produce better service facilities for the growing numbers, requiring an expanded police force.

In the early 1900's the town was run by local selectmen who made its chairman police chief. Several men were elected constable each year. They were also appointed special police officers by the selectmen, to act as the auxiliary police during that era.

In the 1910s and 1920s, Charles Pierce and Andrew Delano were Duxbury constables. Joseph Bolton and Warren Prince were also constables overlapping each other's terms in office. These men were the only law enforcement personnel in Duxbury during that period. Special officers could handle any criminal matter or deliver criminal papers, but they had to be elected constables to handle civil warrants.

James O'Neil was first appointed a constable in Duxbury in 1925 with Andrew Delano, Charles Pierce, and Warren Prince.

In 1925 when James O'Neil was appointed constable, he rode a motorcycle during the summer. Six years later Duxbury activated a permanent force of one man. O'Neil was not only police chief - he was the entire department.

At the 1931 Duxbury town meeting, Articles 28 and 42 determined the organization of a permanent police force, the creation of a police station out of part of the old So. Duxbury school building, and appropriated \$1000 to buy a motorcycle and cruiser for the police department.

James O'Neil was appointed the first full-time police chief in Duxbury on March 16, 1931. This gave the town a police officer on duty, per se, all the time. Chairman of the Board of Selectmen at that time was Sid Soule, who made the official appointment of Chief O'Neil, who thereby relinquished his direct responsibility as acting Chief of Police.

Along with a permanent Chief a number of temporary officers worked when needed. During 1931, 256 calls were answered and complaints investigated, while only 19 arrests were made. (Chevrolet) took the prisoner to Plymouth lock-up. This trip left Duxbury with no cruiser. In these early days the police department closed at midnight, and the Duxbury night operator and Plymouth Police received calls and complaints. In an emergency the night operator called Chief O'Neil.

In 1932, the selectmen appointed Earl Chandler as the town's first permanent full-time patrolman. Chandler had worked as a temporary since 1929. In 1933, Lawrence Doyle joined the force as a temporary officer and became a full-time regular in 1935. Duxbury had 2 Harley Davidson motorcycles and one car for cruising duties. In 1937 the Duxbury Police Department grew to 4 full-time men when Elmer Phillips became a regular patrolman.

In 1932 the department bought its first 2-way radio. This radio would pick up calls from the State Police in Norwell and the Plymouth Police Department. It modernized the police operation for quicker response and enabled the night operator to relay all calls through Plymouth Police, who were then able to reach the cruiser on patrol in Duxbury.

In 1940 George (Frank) White, who lived on Franklin St., became a special officer. At this time most of the surrounding towns, including Duxbury, did not have a car or patrol on the road from midnight to 8 am. The night town telephone operator, George Josselyn, took calls and relayed them to an officer's home. All other calls at night were sent through the Plymouth Police Department and relayed by 2-way radios to patrol cars on the road. Plymouth provided Duxbury, Kingston, Pembroke, and Marshfield with similar services.

White recalls that the department in those days had 2 1935 Harley Davidson motorcycles each weekend on patrol. (These motorcycles are still at the police station.) During the July 4th celebration and parade Chandler and Doyle usually drove these motorcycles.

In 1941 White became a regular police officer, beginning a tour of 13 years working the midnight to 8 am shift, the first for Duxbury.

At this time Kingston, Pembroke and Marshfield, having no early morning patrol, relied on the night operator and Plymouth Police to collect and filter their calls. Officer White recalls the difficulty in handling accidents and injured people during that period. "All the calls came through Plymouth and were relayed to the Duxbury cruiser to respond. If anyone needed a doctor at the scene, Plymouth Police would be notified, and a doctor from Plymouth would come. In case of a need for an ambulance other than the cruiser, the Plymouth Police had to telephone the only ambulance available in Marshfield and wait for a response. This ambulance did not have a 2-way radio, which often made it difficult to locate the accident."

During the war years (1941 through 1946) an air raid alert phone was installed in the police station. (Abbot House on St. George St.) This was manned 24 hours a day. Officer worked 12-hour shifts manning the alert phone. They were paid for 8 hours and donated 4.

The top floor of the station was used as barracks for 27 army personnel who patrolled the beach for national security. Several military police were also billeted at the Allan home on Washington St. Their responsibility was to guard the Cable House at the corner of St. George and Washington Streets. Security on the beach was stringently enforced. Anyone trying to go on the beach at night was stopped, checked, and name taken to be verified on their return.

Duxbury's enforcement during World War II included the cooperation of local police and the armed forces. Officer White recalls that during the first 2 years of the war they would cruise around town with only parking lights on the cruisers because of blackout regulations. The last 4 years of the war they painted the top half of the headlights black to avoid unnecessary glare for night patrol and to keep within the regulations of blackout and air raids.

After the war, the department grew to 6 full-time regular officers while hiring additional intermittent and special officers on the beach patrol; also when needed to supplement the regular force. In 1959 Chief James O'Neil retired from the police force after 34 years of service and 28 years as police chief. Population had more than doubled during his tenure; the workload went from 245 calls and complaints in 1931, to 2499 in 1959 and the list of offenses jumped from 19 to 87 in 1959.

The selectmen then appointed Earl Chandler as the second police chief in its history. Lawrence Doyle was a police sergeant. In 1961 Chief Chandler retired at age 65 after 32 years of service, and his last 2 years as police chief. Chief Chandler's comment upon retirement was, "I have witnessed the population triple during my tenure as a police officer, and the police job has become more important."

In 1961 Lawrence Doyle became the third full-time police chief in Duxbury history on Nov. 1. Soon thereafter Henry McNeil and Thomas Johnson were made sergeants. During this period the town adopted civil service regulations pertaining to appointments and promotions.

Chief Doyle pressed hard for the construction of a separate police station, including the town's own lockup, offices, and radio systems.

At the Town Meeting, after listening to Chief Doyle's appeal for the building, the town voted \$125,000 to build and equip a new police department at the corner of West and Church Streets. The workload had developed to 8319 calls and complaints, and 259 lists of offenses by 1967. During the construction of the police building, under the careful eye of Chief Doyle, the Chief's dream was becoming a reality. Unfortunately, before the building was completed, Chief Doyle died on May 14, 1967.

The selectmen named Sgt. McNeil acting chief. In May of 1967 the new station was dedicated in Chief Doyle's memory.

In late 1967 McNeil was made permanent chief of police. During his tenure, the town's population went over 12,000 year-round residents. The figure is a few thousand in the summer. Workload of the department has escalated to 15,481 calls and complaints and 668 lists of offenses.

The present police force has 26 regular full-time officers, including Chief McNeil, Captain Thomas Johnson, Sergeants LaFleur, Wills and Cunco, and 21 patrolmen.